



COMM310: Media & Society
4 Units

Spring 2020– Tuesday, 6:30 - 9:20 pm

Section: 20495

Location: ANN L 105A

Instructor: Robert Scheer

Office: ASC 121A

Office Hours: by appointment

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I. Course Description

Our media and our society at large are experiencing tremendous shifts - economic inequality is increasing at an alarming rate; consolidated corporations are growing not only in wealth but in power; and tumultuous changes are occurring in both the financing structure and technological nature of our media. Focusing on guest speakers with deep knowledge of pieces of the larger puzzle, this class takes a dynamic look at topics as diverse as media ownership; the economic recession and its root causes; the changing news media landscape; inter-group relations and community; pornography and violence; gender and race; standards of beauty and cosmetic surgery; sexuality; media ethics; war; national security; privacy and surveillance; and the conduct of politics. These issues provide insights into the interplay of our media and broader social and economic forces, as well as how our media as a system reacts to current events.

With that in mind, the key concepts that we'll be exploring include the structural and social forces that drive media to cover stories a certain way — and what that means for our democracy and our relations with the world. Why was the financial crisis under-covered, or covered in an incredibly inadequate way? What forces are at play that drive particular types of coverage and not others? Why is it that “mainstream media” never seem critical enough, and is more incisive coverage even possible given the bottom-line concerns of media corporations today? We'll also be emphasizing what new media (social or otherwise) and other forces driving change mean for the future of traditional media and the way we obtain our information.

Those societal and media changes are also reflected in the changing role of the university, in the educational system and in particular relevance to our class at this university. Those issues range from the conduct of sports programs, the guarantee of a safe, but challenging educational environment and the vocational skills, including critical thinking needed for an internet defined world.

Keep in mind three questions during each session. First, what does a discussion of ethics mean for the topic being explored? The United States' claim to be a representative democracy relies on the notion of the "informed citizen"; our focus on "ethics" here reflects not "rights and wrongs" in a banal sense, but rather whether or not our media serves the ambitious end of truly informing the public. We also need to ask whether the changes underway make our media more or less effective at doing so. Second, how does power operate on and in the evolving media environment? Finally, what structures and systems are at play? These are some of the core concepts we'll be emphasizing on exams and quizzes.

II. Student Learning Outcomes

The central goal of this class is to improve the knowledge base and thinking skills of students required to engage critically with the issues raised in the interaction of the two rapidly changing variables of media and society. That skill set will be honed by examining a series of case studies on the topics outlined above relying for currency on the expertise of guest lecturers, the professor's podcasts and weekly readings. The professor's book offers an arc for considering the social tensions arising from an increasingly wired communications world while observing the historical antecedents of today's divisive media and society arena. The book is offered as a basis of discussion rather than a catalogue of answers which also guides the class selection of informed speakers in the hopes of making our students "good at lunch" meaning that they can contribute knowledgeably to the critical communications debates encountered in their professional lives.

Prerequisite(s): none

Co-Requisite(s): none

Concurrent Enrollment: none

Recommended Preparation: none

III. Course Notes

Students are expected to sign up with TopHat at their expense although the company has provided some free access for financially stressed students. TopHat is used to record class participation, attendance and quizzes. We also use Blackboard as an additional means of informing students of assignments and other information.

IV. Description and Assessment of Assignments

Class Readings & Assignments:

Read, *They Know Everything About You*, by Robert Scheer

Readings: from assigned book, listening or reading assigned podcasts and news articles pertinent to current issues.

Based on the weekly assignments and the prior class speaker & discussions, weekly quizzes will be given at the beginning of each class.

There will also be a number of extra credit options that can help increase the course grade.

V. Grading

a. Breakdown of Grade

Assignment	Points	% of Grade
Attendance & Participation	15	15
Weekly quizzes based on prior class and assignments	25	25
Mid-term exam	30	30
Final exam	30	30
TOTAL		100%

b. Grading Scale

95% to 100%: A	80% to 83%: B-	67% to 69%: D+
90% to 94%: A-	77% to 79%: C+	64% to 66%: D
87% to 89%: B+	74% to 76%: C	60% to 63%: D-
84% to 86%: B	70% to 73%: C-	0% to 59%: F

c. Grading Standards

You will receive details about each assignment/exam separately. All assignments need to be completed and handed in via Blackboard on time to avoid a grade reduction. If you are unable to turn in an assignment due to illness or a personal emergency, you must provide written documentation that will allow you to be excused or discuss your situation with me in a timely manner. Do not wait until the end of the semester to sort things out.

In order to pass this class, you will need to complete ALL of the assignments. Failure to complete one or more of them will result in an F in the class.

Grades will be assigned as follows:

A/A- outstanding, thoughtful and enthusiastic work

B+/B above average work, demonstrating good insight into assignment

B-/C+ needs improvement on ideas, argument and follow through

C and below fulfilling the bare minimum and showing little understanding of the material

Each assignment will be worth 100 points and will be converted to a percentage score depending upon the weight assigned to each. Your percentage scores won the assignments will be totaled and translated to a letter grade per the scale shown below:

d. Grading Timeline

Grading will be completed by the following weeks class and students can meet with their graders first and then Professor Scheer for further explanation.

VI. Assignment Rubrics

None

VII. Assignment Submission Policy

- A. All assignments are due on the dates specified. Lacking prior discussion and agreement with the instructor, late assignments will automatically be given a grade of F.
- B. Assignments must be submitted via Blackboard.

VIII. Required Readings and Supplementary Materials

Detailed above

IX. Laptop Policy

All undergraduate and graduate Annenberg majors and minors are required to have a PC or Apple laptop that can be used in Annenberg classes. Please refer to the [Annenberg Digital Lounge](#) for more information. To connect to USC's Secure Wireless network, please visit USC's [Information Technology Services](#) website.

X. Add/Drop Dates for Session 001 (15 weeks: 1/13/20 – 5/1/20)

Friday, January 31: Last day to register and add classes for Session 001

Friday, January 31: Last day to drop a class without a mark of "W," except for Monday-only classes, and receive a refund for Session 001

Tuesday, February 4: Last day to drop a Monday-only class without a mark of "W" and receive a refund for Session 001

Friday, February 28: Last day to drop a course without a mark of "W" on the transcript for Session 001. [Please drop any course by the end of week three (or the 20 percent mark of the session) to avoid tuition charges.]

Friday, February 28: Last day to change pass/no pass to letter grade for Session 001. [All major and minor courses must be taken for a letter grade.]

Friday, April 3: Last day to drop a class with a mark of "W" for Session 001

XI. Course Schedule: A Weekly Breakdown

Since the course centers on the two rapidly changing variables of media and society the calendar is flexible in order to respond to contemporary issues. The basic "deliverables" of critical thinking concerning media representation of race, class, gender, ethnicity, political and economic power, war and peace, poverty and wealth, are informed by historical references, contemporary controversies and an awareness of the revolutionary impact of the internet as outlined in the assigned book: *They Know Everything About You*.

Important note to students: Be advised that this syllabus is subject to change - and probably will change - based on the progress of the class, news events, and/or guest speaker availability.

	Topics/Daily Activities Speakers	Readings and Homework	Deliverable/Due Dates
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Week 1 Dates: 1/14	Petros Papadakis, USC season of scandal		
Week 2 Dates: 1/21	Nicholas Goldberg LA Times editorial page editor Movie-Inventing LA	Podcasts - Petros Papadakis, Nicholas Goldberg	[MLK Day: Monday, January 20]
Week 3 Dates: 1/28	John Dean covering the impeachment Movie – Oliver Stone Nixon	Preface of the book John Dean podcast	
Week 4 Dates: 2/4	Prisons and justice interview from death row.	Chapter 1 of book Podcasts - Kevin Cooper, Gary Tyler.	
Week 5 Dates: 2/11	Dennis Kucinich	Podcast – Dennis Kucinich	
Week 6 Dates: 2/18	Ron Kovic	Podcast – Ron Kovic Film Born on the Fourth of July.	[President's Day: Monday, February 17]
Week 7 Dates: 2/25	CIA agent Jeffrey Sterling	Podcast – Jeffrey Sterling	
Week 8 Dates: 3/3	The end of privacy & the internet business model	Review of first four chapters of the book.	
Week 9 Dates: 3/10	Mid-term		
Spring Break Dates: 3/17	No Classes		
Week 10 Dates: 3/24	China & US hegemony	Podcast Clayton Dube and Janet Yang.	
Week 11 Dates: 3/31	Contradictions of multi-national corporations & globalization	Review of last four chapters of They Know Everything About you.	
Week 12 Dates: 4/7	Can the center hold – The 2 Americas, the Gay struggle & Larry Gross	Podcast Larry Gross	
Week 13 Dates: 4/14	Can the center hold – Black Lives Matter, Me Too,	Melena Abdulah podcast, James Forman.	

	Class division & populism		
Week 14 Dates: 4/21	Images of dystopia-Orwell vs Huxley & the Chomsky synthesis	Chomsky podcast and sections of 1984 and Brave New World.	
Week 15 Dates: 4/28	Final preparation & evaluations		
STUDY DAYS Dates: 5/2-5/5			
FINAL EXAM PERIOD Dates: 5/12	final		

XII. Policies and Procedures

Additional Policies

Students should inform the Professor in person or by email if need to miss a class.

Communication

Professor will be available to meet with students at a mutually convenient time. Students can contact the Professor by email to set up an appointment.

Statement on Academic Conduct and Support Systems

Academic Conduct:

Plagiarism – presenting someone else’s ideas as your own, either verbatim or recast in your own words – is a serious academic offense with serious consequences. Please familiarize yourself with the discussion of plagiarism in SCampus in Part B, Section 11, “Behavior Violating University Standards” policy.usc.edu/scampus-part-b. Other forms of academic dishonesty are equally unacceptable. See additional information in SCampus and university policies on scientific misconduct, policy.usc.edu/scientific-misconduct.

Support Systems:

Counseling and Mental Health - (213) 740-9355– 24/7 on call

<https://studenthealth.usc.edu/counseling/>

Free and confidential mental health treatment for students, including short-term psychotherapy, group counseling, stress fitness workshops, and crisis intervention.

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline - 1 (800) 273-8255 – 24/7 on call

suicidepreventionlifeline.org

Free and confidential emotional support to people in suicidal crisis or emotional distress 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

Relationship and Sexual Violence Prevention Services (RSVP) - (213) 740-9355(WELL), press "0" after hours – 24/7 on call

<https://studenthealth.usc.edu/sexual-assault/>

Free and confidential therapy services, workshops, and training for situations related to gender-based harm.

Office of Equity and Diversity (OED)- (213) 740-5086 / Title IX – (213) 821-8298

equity.usc.edu, titleix.usc.edu

Information about how to get help or help someone affected by harassment or discrimination, rights of protected classes, reporting options, and additional resources for students, faculty, staff, visitors, and applicants.

Reporting Incidents of Bias or Harassment - (213) 740-5086 or (213) 821-8298

https://usc-advocate.symplicity.com/care_report/

Avenue to report incidents of bias, hate crimes, and microaggressions to the Office of Equity and Diversity |Title IX for appropriate investigation, supportive measures, and response.

The Office of Disability Services and Programs - (213) 740-0776

dsp.usc.edu

Support and accommodations for students with disabilities. Services include assistance in providing readers/notetakers/interpreters, special accommodations for test taking needs, assistance with architectural barriers, assistive technology, and support for individual needs.

USC Campus Support and Intervention - (213) 821-4710

<https://uscса.usc.edu/>

Assists students and families in resolving complex personal, financial, and academic issues adversely affecting their success as a student.

Diversity at USC - (213) 740-2101

diversity.usc.edu

Information on events, programs and training, the Provost's Diversity and Inclusion Council, Diversity Liaisons for each academic school, chronology, participation, and various resources for students.

USC Emergency - UPC: (213) 740-4321, HSC: (323) 442-1000 – 24/7 on call

dps.usc.edu, emergency.usc.edu

Emergency assistance and avenue to report a crime. Latest updates regarding safety, including ways in which instruction will be continued if an officially declared emergency makes travel to campus infeasible.

USC Department of Public Safety - UPC: (213) 740-6000, HSC: (323) 442-120 – 24/7 on call

dps.usc.edu

Non-emergency assistance or information.

Annenberg Student Success Fund

<https://annenber.usc.edu/current-students/resources/annenber-scholarships-and-awards>

The Annenberg Student Success Fund is a donor-funded financial aid account available to USC Annenberg undergraduate and graduate students for non-tuition expenses related to extra- and co-curricular programs and opportunities.

Breaking Bread Program [undergraduate students only]

<https://undergrad.usc.edu/faculty/bread/>

The Breaking Bread Program is designed to provide individual undergraduate students with an opportunity to meet and have scholarly discussions with faculty members outside of the normal classroom setting. Through this program, students and faculty enjoy good company and great conversation by literally “breaking bread” over a meal together and USC will pick up the tab! Your meal event can take place anywhere outside of the normal classroom setting. Your venue can be a restaurant or eatery on or off-campus.